

In the Claims:

1. A method for providing quality control in an analytical instrument, said method comprising the steps of:

sending one or more quality control specimens to an operator of the analytical instrument;

~~directly or indirectly~~ communicating control data to the analytical instrument, wherein the control data includes characteristic values for the one or more quality control specimens, and wherein the control data is created independently of the analytical instrument;

analyzing the quality control specimen using the analytical instrument and thereby creating instrument analysis data;

performing an evaluation within the analytical instrument of the instrument analysis data relative to the control data to determine a functional status of the analytical instrument; and

providing notice to an operator regarding the functional status of the analytical instrument.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the evaluation is performed without operator input.

3. (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein the evaluation is performed using routines preprogrammed within the analytical instrument.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of performing an evaluation within the analytical instrument includes a comparison of the characteristic values for the one or more quality control specimens and one or more characteristic values created within the instrument analysis data.

Claims 6-7. (Canceled)

8. (Original) The method of claim 1, further including the step of communicating to the analytical instrument that the quality control specimen is for quality control purposes.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the step of communicating to the analytical instrument that the quality control specimen is for quality control purposes is performed without operator input.

10. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein the step of communicating to the analytical instrument that the quality control specimen is for quality control purposes is performed by the analytical instrument reading a machine-readable label.

Claims 11-13. (Canceled)

14. (Original) The method of claim 1, further including the step of providing a preprogrammed schedule for quality control procedures to analytical instrument.

Claims 15-18. (Canceled)

19. (Currently Amended) A method for providing quality control in an analytical instrument, said method comprising the steps of:

sending one or more quality control specimens to an operator of the analytical instrument;

~~directly or indirectly~~ communicating control data to the analytical instrument, wherein the control data includes acceptable operating standards, and wherein the control data is created independently of the analytical instrument;

analyzing the quality control specimen using the analytical instrument and thereby creating instrument analysis data;

performing an evaluation within the analytical instrument of the instrument analysis data relative to the control data to determine a functional status of the analytical instrument; and

providing notice to the operator regarding the functional status of the analytical instrument.

20. (Currently amended) A quality control system for analytical instruments, said system comprising:

one or more quality control specimens, each having one or more known predetermined characteristic values and an identifier that can identify the quality control specimen and the one or more characteristic values;

an analytical instrument, having an analyzer for analyzing the one or more quality control specimens, and thereby create instrument analysis data that includes one or more sensed characteristic values;

means for performing an evaluation of the analytical instrument within the analytical instrument using the instrument analysis data and the known predetermined characteristic values to determine a functional status of the analytical instrument; and

means for notifying an operator regarding the functional status of the analytical instrument.

21. (Previously presented) The quality control system of claim 20, wherein the means for performing an evaluation of the analytical instrument within the analytical instrument does not require input from an operator.

22. (Original) The quality control system of claim 21, wherein the system further comprises a standardized identifier displayed with the system that identifies the system as using quality control procedures.

23. (Original) The quality control system of claim 22, wherein the system further comprises means for selectively preventing the reporting of test results in the event the functional status of the analytical instrument is determined to be unacceptable.

24. (Currently Amended) A method for providing quality control in an analytical instrument, said method comprising the steps of:

providing one or more quality control specimens; and control data that includes characteristic values for the one or more quality control specimens; to an operator of the analytical instrument, wherein the control data is created independently of the analytical instrument;

analyzing at least one of the one or more quality control specimens and thereby creating instrument analysis data;

performing an evaluation within the analytical instrument of the instrument analysis data relative to the control data to determine a functional status of the analytical instrument; and

providing notice to an operator regarding the functional status of the analytical instrument.